

חג סוכות

Most likely you add this request from HaKodosh Boruch Hu every time that you *bentch* during the 7 days of Sukkos. It could very well be that, in addition to saying it as a prayer, you sing it as well.

Do we think about what this prayer means?

The words are:

הַרְחֵמֵנוּ הוּא יְקִים לָנוּ אֶת סוּכַת דָּוִד הַנוֹפֶלֶת.

The Merciful One should erect for us the *Sukkah* of Dovid that is falling¹.

This *tefilah* is a paraphrase of a verse in the *Novi Amos* (Perek 9/Posuk 11) that reads:

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶקִּים אֶת סֹכַת דָּוִד הַנֹּפֶלֶת וְגִדְרֹתַי אֶת פְּרֻצֶיהָ וְהִרְסֹתַי אֶקִּים
וּבְנִיתֶיהָ כִּימֵי עוֹלָם:

On that day I Hashem will erect the falling *Sukkah* of David and I will fence the broken pieces and erect its destroyed parts and I will build it as it was in the past.

Before you continue reading, think for yourself what it means!

In fact, all the commentators that I have seen give one consistent explanation and many Midrashim write the same, although some provide a different one.

Radak speaks for the majority. He writes:

ביום ההוא - ביום הגאולה אקים את סוכת דוד הנופלת... מלכות דוד תקום והיא
הסוכה על דרך משל כי היא סוככת על העם:

¹The seemingly awkwardness of 'falling' instead of 'fell' or will 'fall' will be discussed later. 'Falling' is the precise translation of נופלת.

On that day – on the day of redemption I will erect the falling Sukkah of David...the dynasty of David will arise and is what is meant by ‘Sukkah’, as a parable. [It is appropriate because the Sukkah protects the people and so does the king.]

Metzudos writes:

אקים וגו' – רוצה לומר אחזיר המלוכה לבית דוד אשר נפלה והושפלה בימי הגולה:

I will erect etc. – It means to say, ‘I will restore the dynasty to the House of David that fell and was disgraced during the time of the Exile².’

Now, if the verse had used the word בית, House, it would be easier to understand this interpretation.

We read in the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos (Perek 1/Posuk 21):

וַיְהִי כִּי יִרְאוּ הַמִּיִּלְדֹּת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים... לְאִקִּים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:

And it was because the midwives feared G-d, He made for them Houses.

And Rashi writes:

ויעש להם בתים - בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות שקרויין בתים. ויבן את בית ה' ואת בית המלך (מלכים א ט/א³).

He made for them Houses – Houses of *Kehunah* and *Leviya* and royalty are called *Botim* as it is written, ‘He built the House of G-d and the house of the king.’

Throughout Sefer Shmuel and in the Books of Melachim and Yeshaya we find the term בית דוד referring to the royal house of Dovid HaMelech.

²Radak understands אקים to mean erecting or establishing for the very first time. In fact, the House of David was established thousands of years ago and therefore *o'kim* must be interpreted to mean ‘restore’.

³ The entire verse reads:

וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹת שְׁלֹמֹה לְבַנוֹת אֶת בַּיִת ה' וְאֶת בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת כָּל חֲשֶׁק שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת:
And it was when Shlomo completed the building of the House of Hashem and the house of the king and all the desire of Shlomo that he desired to do.

However, since the term *bayis*, in any of its forms, is not used in the verse, the interpretation that *Sukkas Dovid* refers to that seems difficult to understand.

Alshich HaKodosh sums up many of the issues in his commentary to the Posuk in Amos:

ביום ההוא אקים את סוכת דוד וכו'. ראוי לשים לב מה היא סוכת דוד, אם הוא
ישראל למה קורא אותם סוכה ולמה מכנה אותם לדוד. ועוד אומרנו הנופלת לשון
הוזה...

On that day I will erect the Sukkah of David etc. – It is proper to pay attention to understanding the term *Sukkas Dovid*. If it is referring to Israel, why are they called a Sukkah, and why are they termed as belonging to Dovid HaMelech? Additionally, it says *no'feles*, falling, in the present tense, [it already fell]?

Some Midrashim interpret the verse in Amos as most probably would have guessed – referring to the Beis HaMikdosh.

We read in the *Pesikta* of Tish'a B'av (29):

בא עמוס אמר לה עמדי וקבלי כוס תנחומים, ואמרה לו מה בידך ומה בכוסך, אמר
לה אמר לי הקדוש ברוך הוא שאני שב שבתך ובונה בית המקדש ביום ההוא
אקים את סוכת דוד הנופלת:

Amos came and said to *Knesses Yisroel*, 'Arise and accept a cup of consolation.' *Knesses Yisroel* said to him, 'What is in your hand? What is in your cup?' He said to *Knesses Yisroel*, 'Hashem told me, "I am bringing back your captives and building the Beis HaMikdosh- on that day I will erect the falling Sukka of David".'

The same is implied, though not as explicit, in Midrash B'reishis Rabba on Parshas Vayeshev (Parshata 88/7):

מי מחכה לסוכת דוד הנופלת שיקימנה הקדוש ברוך הוא, שנאמר ביום ההוא אקים את סוכת דוד, שיהיו כל העולם אגודה אחת שנאמר (צפניה ג ט) כי אז אהפוך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרוא כלם בשם ה' ולעבדו שכם אחד.

Who is awaiting the falling Sukkah of David that Hashem will erect, as it says, 'On that day I will erect the [falling] Sukkah of David? [It is waiting for] the entire world to become united into one grouping as it says, 'Because then I will turn all the nations to a clear language for all of them to call unto G-d and to serve Him together.'

Since it is referring to united prayer to the Ribbono Shel Olom it is very easy to understand the commentary of *Alshich HaKodosh* on this verse who writes that the subject is the Beis HaMikdosh.

In his commentary to Sefer Amos, Rashi seems to adopt both explanations, following in the footsteps of the Targum. He writes there:

ביום ההוא - אחרי בא עליהם כל אלה יבא יום ההוא המוכן לגאולה ובו אקים סוכת דוד הנפלת, יונתן תרגם מלכותא דבית דוד:

On that day – After all of the punishment will come upon them, *that* day that will be readied for Redemption will come and on it I Hashem will erect the falling Sukkah of David. Targum Yonoson explains that it refers to the dynasty of the reign of Dovid HaMelech.

Targum Yonoson writes:

בְּעֵדְנָא הָהִיא אֶקִּים יְת מְלֻכּוּתָא דְּבֵית דָּוִד דְּנִפְלֵת וְאֶבְנֵי יְת כְּרַפְיָהוֹן וְכִנְיִשְׁתָּהוֹן
אֶתְקִין וְתִשְׁלוּט בְּכָל מְלֻכּוּתָא וְתִגְמַר וְתִשְׁיָצִי סְגִי מִשְׁרֵיתָא וְהִיא תִתְבְּנֵי וְתִשְׁתַּכְּלִיל
בְּיוֹמֵי עֵלְמָא:

At that time I will erect the dynasty of the reign of Dovid and I will build their cities and I will repair their synagogues and you will rule over the entire kingdom and you will complete and finish the *Mishkan* and it will be built and completed for all time.

Do we have here a typical dispute where the various opinions have no meeting point, nothing in common or is there a way for us to take a step back and view each of these various opinions as providing a different aspect for our understanding of this Posuk in Sefer Amos and understanding the Yom Tov of Sukkos which will soon be upon us?

In other words: what connection can we find that takes into account the Yom Tov of Sukkos, the Beis HaMikdosh and the Davidic dynasty?

Malbim sees much significance in using the Sukkah as the model for the descendants of Dovid HaMelech.

By definition, a Sukkah is a weak structure. It has to be fit for a *דירת עראי*, a temporary dwelling. If it meets the definition of a *דירת קבע*, a permanent dwelling, it is disqualified for use⁴.

After the death of Shlomo HaMelech, son of Dovid HaMelech, the dynasty began to unravel until it finally came to an apparent end with the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh and the capture of the final King Tzidkiyahu.

This process was a fulfilment of G-d's Will as we read in Sefer Melachim I (Perek 12/Posuk 15):

וְלֹא שָׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל הָעָם כִּי הִיְתָה סִבָּה מֵעַם ה' לְמַעַן הִקְיָם אֶת דְּבָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'
בְּיַד אַחֲזִיָּה הַשִּׁילִי נִי אֶל יְרֻבָּעַם בֶּן נְבָט:

King Rechavam ignored the people's demands because this was a cause from G-d in order to establish His Word that He spoke through the prophet AchiaHaShiloni to Yorov'om ben N'vot.

It is true that with the election of Hillel as the *nosi*, Hillel a direct descendant of Dovid HaMelech, parts of the dynasty were reawakened, but in a far less significant role⁵. For the next seven generations, through Rabi Yehuda HaNosi, the

⁴For a discussion of the definition of *עראי* and *קבע* in regards to Sukka, see Mishnah B'rurah Siman 633/s'if koton 3 and 633/s'if koton 2.

⁵Dovid HaMelech was direct descendant of Yehuda ben Yaakov Ovinu. When Yaakov Ovinu blessed his son he said (B'reishis Perek 49/Posuk 10), among other things:

לֹא יִסּוּר שִׁבְט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחֲקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילָה שִׁילּוֹ וְלוֹ יִקְהֶת עַמִּים:
The staff will not turn from the tribe of Yehuda and the sceptre from between his legs until *Shilo* [the Moshiach] will come and to him the nations will gather.

Rashi writes:

nesi'im were descendants of Dovid, with the exception of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

Even following Rabi Yehuda HaNosi, after the termination of the era of Tannaim, the successors in leadership were further offspring of the Davidic family. Those leaders were called נשיאה, an Aramaic term, to distinguish them from their forebears who were Tannaim.

When the Jewish populace finally became centred in Babylonia, there, too, further descendants of Dovid HaMelech served in the position of ריש גלותא, the exilarch.

However, just as the positions of *nosi* and *nesiah* came to an end in Eretz Yisroel, so did the position of exilarch terminate in Babylonia. There was no longer a vestige of the seed of David as unique leaders of the Jewish People.

Thus, the Sukkah as a symbol of weakness, a sign of a lack of permanence, is a fitting parable for the Davidic dynasty. It lasted for a limited time only and disintegrated over the years.

The symbolic Sukkah, however, does not only deal with the decline of the reign of Dovid's descendants. It deals also with the restoration of his future generation's rule. That too will be gradual.

Although Malbim does not mention it, a sort of proof text for this is found in the Yerushalmi Masseches Yoma (Perek 3/Halachah 2) where we read:

לא יסור שבט מיהודה - מדוד ואילך, אלו ראשי גליות שבבבל שרודים את העם בשבט שממונים על פי המלכות:

The staff will not turn from the tribe of Yehuda – beginning with Dovid and from then on. This refers to the exilarchs in Babylonia that ruled the people harshly and were appointed by the Babylonian kings.

ומחקק מבין רגליו - תלמידים, אלו נשיאי ארץ ישראל:
And the sceptre from between his legs – This refers to students with whom laws are made [since מחוקק comes from the word *chok*]. These are the *nesi'im* in Eretz Yisroel.

דלמא ר' חייא רובה ורבי שמעון בן חלפתא הוו מהלכין בהדא בקעת ארבל בקריצתא ראו אילת השחר שבקע אורה אמר רבי חייא רובה לרבי שמעון בן חלפתא בר רבי כץ היא גאולתן של ישראל בתחילה קימעא קימעא כל שהיא הולכת היא הולכת ומאיר...

An event – Rabi Chiya the elder and Rabi Shimon ben Chalafta were walking through the Arbel valley at night. They saw the appearance of the morning star, the light of which penetrated the darkness. Rabi Chiya the elder said to Rabi Shimon bar Chalafta bar Rabi Yehuda HaNosi, 'Such will be the redemption of Israel. At the beginning it will be very slow until it increases and will shed its light.'

The gradual dissipation of power and substance, the *Sukkah-effect*, was part and parcel of the events leading up to the Churban.

We read in Masseches Rosh Hashana (31 a):

אמר רב יהודה בר אידי אמר רבי יוחנן: עשר מסעות נסעה שכינה, מקראי. וכנגדן גלתה סנהדרין, מגמרא.

Rav Yehuda bar I'di said in the name of Rabi Yochanan, 'The Shechinah travelled away from the *KodeshKodoshim* on ten journeys. We learn this from various P'sukim. Parallel to that, the Sanhedrin was exiled to ten places. We have this as a *Masorah* – tradition.'

The *Sukkah-effect* was part and parcel of the fate of the Beis HaMikdash, not only the Davidic dynasty.

We hear a similar idea in Masseches Sanhedrin where there is a passage that seems most cryptic. We read (96 a):

אמר ליה רב נחמן לרבי יצחק: מי שמיע לך אימת אתי בר נפלי? - אמר ליה: מאן בר נפלי? - אמר ליה: משיח. - משיח בר נפלי קרית ליה? - אמר ליה: אין, דכתיב ביום ההוא אקים את סכת דויד הנפלת. -

Rav Nachman said to Rabi Yitzchak, 'Have you heard [from your teachers] when the 'son of the falling one' will come?' Rabi Yitzchak said, 'Who is the

‘son of the fallen⁶ one’? He said, ‘The Moshiach’. ‘You are talking about Moshiach and you call him the ‘the son of the fallen one’ [seemingly so disrespectful]?’ He said to him, ‘Yes. This is like it says ‘on that day I will erect the falling Sukkah of Dovid.

Maharsha explains:

בר נפלי כו'. הא ודאי דקרי ליה בלשון נפילה ע ל שם נפילת ישראל בגלות... וקאמר עד אימת יהיה אותה נפילה שיהיה להם תקומה ואמר ליה מאן בר נפלי ואמאי קרית ליה למשיח בר נפלי דהוה ליה לקרותו נפלי על שם נפילת ישראל וקאמר על שם מלכות בית דוד שנפלה בגלות קרי ליה בר נפלי כדכתיב אקים את סוכת דוד הנופלת ועד אימת יהיה אותה נפילה עד שתשיב המלוכה לבן דוד.

The son of the falling one – It is certain that Rav Nachman used the term ‘fallen’ referring to how Israel has fallen in Exile. He asked, ‘How long will the falling last until there will be the time when Israel will arise?’ Rav Yitzchak said, ‘who is the *son* of the fallen one? Why not call Moshiach *the* ‘fallen one’ since it refers to the fallen Israel? Why did you call him the *son* of the fallen one?’

Rav Nachman replied, ‘He is called the *son* because it refers to the Davidic dynasty that fell into exile and I called it the *son* because it is written ‘I will erect the falling Sukkah of Dovid. And the falling continues until a descendant of Dovid, a ‘son’ will be restored to the monarchy.

The Sukka of the Beis HaMikdosh and the Sukkah of the royal dynasty have fallen. They did not ‘fall’ in one fell swoop. Rather, they declined gradually, falling a little and then falling some more until the fall was complete.

And, although the historical builder of the Beis HaMikdosh was Shlomo; it was his father’s building. It was Dovid HaMelech who wanted to build it and took the initiative that it should be erected.

⁶We have shown that it is appropriate to translate נופלת literally as ‘falling’. בר נפלי also means the one who is falling.

However an Early Reader has suggested translating it as ‘fallen’ to make the passage more readable.

Dovid HaMelech was the founder of the dynasty that bears his name. Dovid HaMelech was the architect of the Beis HaMikdosh and it was credited to him as we read in Massechesh Shabbos (30 a):

כשבנה שלמה את בית המקדש ביקש להכניס ארון לבית קדשי הקדשים, דבקו שערים זה בזה. אמר שלמה עשרים וארבעה רננות ולא נענה. פתח ואמר: (תהילים כד/ז) שאו שערים ראשיכם והנשאו פתחי עולם ויבא מלך הכבוד, רהטו בתריה למיבלעיה, אמרו: מי הוא זה מלך הכבוד? אמר להו: ה' עוז וגבור. חזר ואמר: (שם ט-י) שאו שערים ראשיכם ונשאו פתחי עולם ויבא מלך הכבוד. מי הוא זה מלך הכבוד ה' צבאות הוא מלך הכבוד סלה ולא נענה. כיון שאמר (דברי הימים ב ו/מב) ה' אל"קים אל תשב פני משיחך זכרה לחסדי דוד עבדך - מיד נענה

When Shlomo HaMelech built the Beis HaMikdosh he attempted to bring the Aron HaKodesh into [its rightful place in] the KodoshKodoshim. The gates stuck together. Shlomo said 24 praises of G-d and his request was not fulfilled. He began saying the verse, 'Gates, raise your heads and let the eternal doors be uplifted and the King of glory should enter'. The gates chased after him wanting to swallow him up⁷. They said, 'Who is the King of glory to whom you refer?' He answered, 'Hashem, strong and a warrior'. Shlomo again said a verse, 'Gates, raise up your heads and raise up the eternal doors and let the King of Glory enter. Who is the King of Glory, it is Hashem the King of hosts forever.' He still wasn't answered.

When Shlomo said, 'Hashem G-d, do not turn back the face of your anointed one; remember the kindnesses of your servant Dovid', he was answered positively immediately.

Both the dynasty and the Beis HaMikdosh were *Sukkos* and let us now understand the reason why the Sukkah is a frail structure, one suited for temporary dwelling only.

⁷ Rashi explains:

רהטו שערים בתריה למבלעיה - סברי דעל עצמו אמר מלך הכבוד...
They ran after him to swallow him up— The gates thought that Shlomo was referring to himself as the king of glory.

Ashkenazic communities have the custom of reciting *L'Dovid Hashem O'ri* (Tehillim Perek 27) beginning in Elul and concluding before Simchas Torah. One of the verses (Posuk 5), relevant for our upcoming Yom Tov is:

כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֻכֹּה בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסִתְרֵי אֹהֶלוֹ בְּצִוֵּר יְרוּמָמַי:

G-d will hide me in His Sukkah on a day of trouble he will secret me in the hidden part of His tent; He will raise me on a rock.

Doesn't it seem strange that if we are fleeing from evil, if we are threatened with harm and destruction that we will take refuge in a Sukkah? Isn't the Sukkah frail and flimsy?

Doesn't a Sukkah seem like a poor choice for a protective shelter?

But, the answer is that that is exactly the point.

The purpose of residing in a Sukkah, a hut made for temporary living is to remember that it is G-d Who protects me, not the physical shelters in which I place my trust.

It is *davka* the Sukkah in which we reside a few days after Yom Kippur. Residing in the Sukkah is the acid test if we were paying mere lip service on that holiest of days or there was, in fact, at least a modicum of sincerity in our words, our thoughts and our hearts.

It is *davka* because we forgot that the world that we construct is only a Sukkah, a frail abode, that dynasties come to an end and the Shechinah forsakes us, taking Its home with It.

That is why the Mishnah in Masseches Sukkah (Perek 2/Mishnah 9) teaches us:

כל שבעת הימים אדם עושה סוכתו קבע וביתו עראי ירדו גשמים מאימתי מותר
לפנות משתסרח המקפה משלו משל למה הדבר דומה לעבד שבא למזוג כוס לרבו
ושפך לו קיתון על פניו:

All seven days of Sukkos a person makes his Sukkah as his permanent dwelling and his home as a temporary one.

When it rains, from when is he allowed to go into his house⁸? When the water coming into the soup ruins it⁹.

The Chachamim explained it as a parable: To what is this matter [of rain causing a person to leave the Sukkah and enter his house] compared? It is compared to a servant who comes to pour his master his goblet of wine but the master throws the wine from the cup onto the face of the servant.

The Sukka is a reminder of G-d's protection. When He causes it to rain He shows that He has removed His special protection.

The Sukkah is flimsy. Does the fact that the Sukkah is such a flimsy residence mean that we are totally bereft of strength, with no ability to survive on our own?

Sukkos has an additional Mitzvah, that of the *Arbo'oh Minim* of Lulav, Esrog, Hadassim and Arovos. Let us see what they represent, especially in the context of what we have learned here.

We read in Pesikta D'Rav Kahana (27/2):

אמר רבי אבין לשנים שנכנסו אצל הדיין ולית אנן ידעין הי דין הוא נציחיה, אלא מה דינסב ביין ידעין דהוא נציחא. כך לפי שישראל ושרי אומות העולם ניכנסין ומקטרגין לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא בראש השנה, ולית אנן ידעין היילין אינון ניצוחיה, אלא ממה שישראל יוצאין מלפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולולביהם ואתרוגיהם בידיהם אנן ידעין דישראל אינון ניצוחיה. לפיכך משה מזהיר את ישראל ואומר להם ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון (ויקרא כג/מ¹⁰):

⁸There are many opinions that on the first night of Sukkos one has to make Kiddush and eat a *k'zayisof* bread (but without the bracha of *Leishev BaSukkah*) in the Sukkah even when it is raining.

⁹The commentators explain that viewing the occurrence of rain during Sukkos as Divine anger is only in climates where rain is unusual. In climates where Sukkos occurs during the rainy season, that moisture is not a curse. Nonetheless the person may still leave the Sukkah.

¹⁰The complete verse reads:

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ עָבֹת וְעַרְבֵי נָחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה'... ל'קִיכֶם שְׂבַעַת יָמִים:

Rabi Avin said a parable of two people who go to court before the judge; we do not know who was victorious. But, when one of the litigants takes some wine, we know that he won [because he was celebrating].

It is similar with Israel and the angelic officers of the nations of the world. They enter and argue before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and we do not know who won.

But, when Israel goes out from before Hashem with their Lulavim and their Esrogim in their hands we know that Israel won. Thus, Moshe warns Israel and says to them, 'Take for yourselves on the first day...'

When there is an understanding of where the source of our strength is, when our Yom HaKippurim davening was not mere lip-service, then we are strong and carry our armaments to prove it.

When there is misplaced emphasis on our prowess and such misplaced emphasis leads us to forget the true source of power and prowess, our imagined sources of prowess find themselves decimated.

When they are decimated, all that we have left are frail structures that cannot really protect us.

If we are battered by the elements then we see that we have not deserved G-d's protective hand; we are the servant who is belittled.

If on the other hand, despite our apparently tenuous circumstances we are spared, then we know that we have been hidden in *His* Sukkah.

This Sukkos we will all recite:

הַרְחַמֵּן הוּא יְקִים לָנוּ אֶת סוּכַת דָּוִד הַנוֹפֶלֶת.

The Merciful One should erect for us the fallen *Sukkah* of Dovid.

You shall take for yourself on the first day, an esrog, a lulav, haddassim and aravos and you shall rejoice before Hashem for seven days.

Let us pray for the restoration of מלכות בית דוד. Let us seek the restoration of the seed of Dovid HaMelech to lead us.

And let us not forget that these prayers can be fulfilled if we allow ourselves to be protected in the Divine Sukkah that never falls and never fails.

ChagSameach

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock